



WACCRA News-Mail 2022 President's Letter

February 2, 2022

Dear WACCRA Members,

We're in the midst of another strange year and continue to ask, "Is this the new normal?" Maybe yes, maybe no, but we've now learned how to negotiate a quarantine, the importance of vaccines and masks, and how to stay connected via Zoom. I hope you and your family have been well and found ways to keep a positive outlook. A wonderful benefit of living in a CCRC is the friends and neighbors that reach out to support us. Senior living is still lively living!

WACCRA continues to grow and be vital and effective. It's hard when we can't meet at the different CCRCs and get to know resident members. Zoom is a lifesaver to keep us meeting and moving forward, but I do look forward to meeting in person. In my 2021 letter to members, I wrote about accomplishments and our goals for the year. This letter is no different, and we have a lot to be proud of. We've made progress on all of our goals.

1. In Olympia, WACCRA successfully lobbied during the 2021 session for five new pieces legislation. The first bill listed is by far the most far-reaching for residents in CCRCs.

- **House Bill 1218 – Improving health, safety, and quality of life for residents in long-term care facilities**
 - Residents in assisted living and skilled nursing can identify an Essential Support Person who may visit in-person regularly even during a quarantine.
 - Long-term care facilities must develop and maintain comprehensive disaster preparedness plans addressing a disaster or emergency, such as a fire, earthquake, flood, infectious disease outbreak, loss of power or water, or other measures that may require sheltering in place, evacuation, or other emergency measures.
 - The new law directs the Departments of Health and Social and Health Services to develop a report and guidelines on epidemic disease preparedness and response for long-term care facilities.
- **House Bill 1120 - Concerning state of emergency operations impacting long-term services and supports**

- House Bill 1323 – Long-term Services and Supports Trust (more about this later)
- Senate Bill 5203 - Producing, distributing, and purchasing generic prescription drugs
- Senate Bill 5258 – Consumer Directed Care
- Budget Augmentation - The State Ombuds' Office budget was cut by \$350,000 dollars. We successfully argued to return that money and augment the Ombud's budget with an additional \$350,000 to support those who live in assisted living and skilled nursing who need mediation and negotiation with management.

At the federal level in Washington, D.C., WACCRA Members were also active:

- An \$11M tax on CCRC skilled nursing beds in Washington, amounting to an \$8000 tax annually on each skilled nursing bed, was defeated.
- A serious reduction of reimbursement for Medicare providers was also defeated. Funding for Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapists had already been reduced by 8% in 2020; the Medicare Administrator wanted another 9% reduction in 2021. Other examples of proposed reductions for specific specialties hitting seniors hard were Optometry – 8%, Ophthalmology – 6%, and Chiropractic – 6%. These reductions would have adversely affected seniors, as providers could not afford to remain in the Medicare market.

2. Updated and Expanded the WACCRA Website - www.waccra.org

Special thanks to Monica Clement from Timber Ridge and Put Barber from Skyline, the masterminds of this overwhelming project. The new site has received national acclaim, and rightfully so. It is easy to navigate, user-friendly and provides significant information and resources. Thanks also to Natalie Siegel from Mirabella and Cassandra Carothers from Horizon House who served as readers, questioners, and editors.

3. Completed the 3rd Edition of the *Consumer Guide to Continuing Care Retirement Communities*

This document is mostly for folks seeking information before making a decision on CCRCs, but is also very helpful for those of us who are already residents. It is available on the WACCRA website, www.waccra.org. The Third Edition was spearheaded by Rick Baugh from Skyline. Sally Soest from Skyline was the original compiler and writer. Ensuing additions and edits were provided by LeadingAge and WACCRA Board Members.

4. Created the document *Introduction to Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) in Washington State*

In working with the State, Kim Hickman, a WACCRA member, but not a CCRC resident, saw the need for an easy document to explain CCRCs, especially to decision-makers. The document is now affectionately referred to as CCRC 101. Kim is the daughter of

Karen Gilmour, an Emerald Heights resident. This document can also be found on our website.

5. Helped CCRC Residents Implement the Agreement: *Commitment to CCRC Practices*

This is a landmark agreement, and the first of its kind nationally. It gives residents a voice in decisions and governance without the need for legislation. Because of the national coverage the Agreement has received, I have answered requests from CCRC resident leadership in Illinois, Florida, California, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Oregon.

Unfortunately, Covid has drastically slowed down our progress and LeadingAge hasn't been available to attend individual CCRC meetings. Fortunately, some Executive Directors (ED) have moved forward on their own. On the CCRC front, both Skyline and Mirabella Resident Councils worked with their management and determined how they would institute the Practices. Timber Ridge is holding its floor meetings to present and talk about how the agreement will be implemented, and their ED is attending some of the floor meetings with their WACCRA leadership to present ideas.

We have found that some CCRC EDs and residents aren't even aware of or have forgotten the Agreement even though the ED signed it and received a joint letter from LeadingAge and WACCRA a year ago. All 23 CCRC Executive Directors in Washington have signed the *Commitment to CCRC Practices* and agreed to make the agreement known and available to residents. If you are a CCRC resident and are unaware of the agreement, please ask your ED for a copy or let me know, and I will be happy to provide an electronic copy via email.

6. Increased Participation in Presidents' Roundtable

Two years ago, WACCRA leadership instituted the idea of getting together as many CCRC presidents as possible to share ideas and problem solve. WACCRA handles logistics; the presidents set the agenda. 18 of 23 CCRC Presidents and/or Vice Presidents have started participating. Presidents learn from one another and discuss issues facing their residents.

7. Expanded WACCRA Membership

On June 1, 2018, WACCRA had 575 members; on June 1, 2021, the number had increased to 907 members, and almost 58% increase in growth. Hence, our growth is 16 to 17 percent annually. Why is this important: NUMBERS COUNT! Legislators want to know who and how many we represent; this is especially so when they have a CCRC in their district.

Looking ahead to 2022, the WACCRA Board has a solid list of priorities:

1. The Board will monitor and help when needed to institute the *Commitment to CCRC Practices*. We would like to get the joint meetings with LeadingAge back on track, but Covid will be the deciding factor. Until then, we work through the Resident Councils.
2. The next step in the mediation between LeadingAge, CCRC executive directors, and WACCRA is to develop a conflict resolution program to address disputes between management and residents in Independent Living. Until such time as LeadingAge and

the executive directors feel that Covid is under control and can make the time to negotiate, we will continue to mark time on this priority.

3. The Board continues to investigate how other states protect the investments seniors make when entering a CCRC. Washington has little oversight over CCRCs other than the registration of a senior living facility that wants to advertise as a CCRC. A number of states treat the CCRC entry payment as an insurance annuity and regulate it as such. Others rely on Health or Human Services type departments to require financial filings and monitoring. The Board is determining which approach will best serve WACCRA members and how to successfully introduce options to the legislature. This is a long-term process, as are all legislative efforts.

4. The Washington Cares Act establishing the first in the nation long term funding program for health care ran into legislative concerns and Governor Inslee has postponed implementation until March of 2023. We will continue to monitor this vitally important initial step in addressing the need for government funding for long term care.

5. With the success of the Presidents' Roundtable the Board is looking at ways to introduce WACCRA membership to CCRCs with few members. Leadership in 18 of the 23 CCRCs in Washington have participated. We will seek entry to hold meetings and talk about the benefits of WACCRA where membership is sparse.

6. WACCRA continues to be your voice in Olympia and Washington, D.C. We will continue to track legislation and regulations that support or detract from senior living. Word will go out via email when we need you to take action. Our lobbyist, Donna Christensen, is on the ground in Olympia and meeting with legislators on our behalf. This year, a third of the legislative members are new, which means lots of educating and advocating, especially with members of the House Health care and Wellness Committee and the Senate Health and Long Term Care Committee.

In closing, I want to thank all of our members. Your support is critical to WACCRA's success. You rally when your voices are needed, be it in Olympia or Washington, DC. Your activism is what makes this organization work. Together we make a positive difference for residents of CCRCs. Thank you for being part of this terrific team!

Cheers,

Donna Kristaponis
WACCRA President